10: d'Orleans--314 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 753, 771, 787, 828

"The great development of the Buddhist creed does not prevent superstitions of another order from being prevalent among the multitude, superstitions the trace of which is easily followed at the great festivals that always appertain to ancient traditions or to the dread of evil spirits. Diseases are regarded in the light of persons, and when the cholera made its appearance here last year, one of the mandarins went round the town at the head of a squad of soldiers who executed discharges of musketry at the gates to drive away the enemy. But the native chief was not rewarded for his zeal, as two days after, as the story goes, the cholera appeared to him in a dream and reproached him for trying to drive it away, saying that in coming to Luang Prabang it was simply doing its duty. As a punishment for his conduct, the cholera announced to him his approaching death, and when the mandarin woke up he was so terrified by the dream that he fell ill and died three days afterwards."

69: Lewis T-5 (1950) 1951 AM1 Indochina
Moi AM9
M'nong

and we were down to the nursing-mothers, who, removing their babies from the breast and passing them to onlookers, tripped lightly towards us. Although the rice-alcohol, with its queer burnt-cereal taste, was weaker than usual, my friends said, it was beginning to take effect. The Moïs had slipped into an easy-going joviality and the nursing-mothers received some mild familiarities, for which they exchanged good-natured slaps. Their capacity for alcohol, though, was greater than that of the elder ladies, and they were not to be deceived by a mere pretence of drinking on our part. Calling for beakers they sucked up the alcohol, spat libations, syphoned off liquor until the beakers were filled, and presented them to us. Taking stock of the situation we saw that we had drunk our way to within two nursing-mothers of those perfect young representatives of the Polynesian race, the chief's daughters, who flung us occasional glances from between sweeping lashes. But we were all flagging, dizzy with the alcohol and the stunning reverberation of the gongs. And the morning was wearing on. It would have been difficult to imagine our condition by the time we had drunk our way down to an interesting social level. The Moïs encouraged us with smiles and gestures, but we could do no more.

It was at a village in the vicinity of Buon Dieo, where two years previously an extraordinary affair had taken place. A family of eight persons were suspected of magic practices to the detriment of the village. According to local custom a representative was chosen as accuser and a trial by ordeal arranged. This consisted of the villagers' champion and the head of the accused family plunging their heads under water, the first to withdraw his head, in this case the accused, being held to have lost the day. According to the rulings of customary law governing this rather unusual case the charged persons were found to be possessed by certain minor demons, located in each case in a bodily organ. The general attitude thus was a sympathetic one. The prisoners were regarded

643• merchandise).
648• His life was also a short one. He died at the age of thirty-three,
175• handing down the crown to an only son born two years after his accession to the throne.

SOM-PHOU (1488-1502), KING 1496-1501.

643• This child, Som-Phou, who gave only his name to his reign, was
175 removed from power by the ministers, for reasons unknown, when he reached the age of thirteen. He then died in the following year.

/71/ VISOUN (1467), KING 1501-1520.

643• His uncle Phé-Sai (1) was summoned to the throne in his place in
175

1. Next to the last son of Tiakaphat.

/821/ 1501. According to the Annals, the sky was streaked with lightning and thundered unceasingly on the coronation day. Struck by this phenomenon, in which they saw a manifestation of divine satisfaction, the Council of Ministers gave him the name of Phaya-Visoun (lightning).
/787/ In 1506 a son was born to him who was named Phothisarath in consequence of a dream which Visoun's mother had a few days before the queen's delivery. "Banyans in flower (Kok-Pho) had appeared to her in which innumerable birds warbled joyfully." When consulted, the priests predicted that the expected child would be a Saint, and in the royal family everyone rejoiced at the thought that the newborn would come into the world under the sign of the sacred tree in whose shade Buddha had attained the triple science and found the secret of the destinies.
346 In order to magnify in anticipation, so to speak, the marvelous
643• events of his reign, King Visoun built many temples around his palace.
175• /72/ The foundations of a pagoda which was erected under his auspices to the memory of a daughter who had died young can still be seen today in Luang-Prabang (1).

1. Another pagoda, "Posot-Luang," which was located on the present site of the ice-house, has completely disappeared. Great celebrations were held there in honor of the birth of Photisarath.

643• PHOTHISARATH (1506), KING 1520-1547.
His son Phothisarath, who succeeded him in 1520, was an extremely

643• Muong-Bo road and took a stand before the latter village. But a
648• disagreement resulting from long-standing rivalry sprang up between
175• the commander of the Xieng-Khouang troops, An-Om, and one of his officers who negotiated with Vientiane and thereby caused a retreat to the capital through the valley of the Nam-Nhiep.

Pressed from all sides, An-Om could not defend /150/ Xieng-Khouang, and Ong-Long's columns entered into it without firing a shot while King Xom-Phou fled along the Muong-Khang road.

In the meantime the king of Annam, who had had word of the dispute, sent his two vassals a message urging them to lay down their arms. The king of Vientiane seemed to be the first to return to peaceful ideas. He had Tran-Ninh evacuated and invited Xom-Phou to come and visit him. The latter doubtless suspected a trap, and spent three years deciding to set out. His fears were not unfounded, for when he reached Som-Di he was suddenly assaulted by a hundred or so of Ong-Long's soldiers, who captured him and took him to Vientiane without any regard for his rank (1).

1. According to the Annals of Tran-Ninh, Xom-Phou was to
/821/ be put to death as they descended the Nam-Lick, but "light-
/787/ ning broke the instrument of punishment in the executioner's hands and they did not dare to execute him."

He had been there for three years when Ong-Long received another message from the king of Annam blaming him for his conduct and ordering him to set Xom-Phou free immediately. He kept this ultimatum to himself, but hastened to begin negotiations for his prisoner's release with every appearance of generosity. The prince /151/ of Tran-Ninh promised tribute, and was finally allowed to return to his own land (1760) (1).

1. Xom-Phou kept his promise, and up until the time of his death came to do homage to the king of Vientiane every three years. The tribute from Xieng-Khouang then consisted of golden flowers weighing twenty ticals each, two horses with silver harness, a thousand swords made of native iron, a thousand brush knives, a thousand shovels, a thousand plowshares and selected foodstuffs. (Cf. de Pelacot, op. cit. /"Le Tran-Ninh historique," Revue indochinoise, Hanoi, 1896./)

It is, moreover, under the reign of Xom-Phou that the

L

urgings, no less than three successive expeditions (the Sourisseau, 624
Friquegnon and Dussault columns) and two years of difficult and 669
costly operations were necessary to restore order and suppress the Yunnanese bands. The deposition of the Chao-Fa -- applicable both to himself and his heirs -- was decreed in April 1916, and the former principality was converted into a simple "muong." Phra-Ong-Kham died in China in 1923, and when his family offered to make its submission it was given permission to return to Muong-Sing.

2. The Meo rebellion (1919-1921). While these events were M
transpiring the Meos, who lived mainly high up on the peaks of 563
Luang-Prabang and Tran-Ninh (1), had maintained a proper atti- 669
L

1. See above, p. 212. 787

tude even though approached by the Chao-Fa and the /358/ Chinese brigands. Nor had they seemed at first to pay any more attention to the movement which their fellows in Tonkin had just initiated in the basin of the upper Black River.

Continuing to live apart from other races in jealous isolation, they had nevertheless seemed for some time past to be moving towards closer terms with the provincial administration, which had succeeded in interesting them in road projects. But in July 1919 one of the leaders of the Tonkin rebellion who was being pursued by our troops and was called Batchay came to seek refuge among them. From this lair he sent out emissaries whose mission it was to devote themselves to secret propaganda efforts among the Meo groupings of Upper Laos in favor of a king who, "accomplishing the will of Heaven, was to bring them happiness, peace and prosperity." The rumor rapidly circulated among these credulous tribes that a prophecy which had fallen from the sky was summoning all Meos to revolt and form a great independent kingdom with its capital at Dien-Bien-Phu or Muong-Heup. To the accompaniment of incantations and magic formulas, the able-bodied population was called to march against the Laotians, Khas and Annamites and to build the palace of the awaited sovereign.

/359/ In vain did the king of Luang-Prabang send messages to L
the Meo leaders in protest against these absurd rumors. Within a M
few weeks armed bands were formed which began to ransom and 563
pillage the villages of Tran-Ninh, Luang-Prabang and the Houa- 669
Phan. Our militia had to occupy the outpost of Muong-Heup, which

776 lay priests preside. These lay priests, or rather these servants of the
793 Spirits, correspond to the Guardians of the Genii in the Buddhist
religion. Usually they exercise their ministry only when one of
755 their countrymen falls sick or dies.

"In case of a serious illness the servant of the Spirits goes to the sick person's house, goes to his side and recites a few prayers. Then he takes a bowl of uncooked rice on which he stands an egg with the smallest end upwards. With his right hand the officiant drops a certain number of grains of rice on the point of the egg, performing this operation three times in all. If the same number of grains of rice remain on the point of the egg each time, this means that a "Spirit" has entered the sick person's body.

•787 "By means of similar maneuvers, the Spirit is then questioned to find out what he wants to eat. Depending on the answer, a buffalo, an ox or a pig may be killed. The designated animal is slaughtered and then scorched without being skinned so as to destroy the hairs which cover it. The entrails are taken out and carefully washed [154] in running water, then replaced in the animal's body. The victim is taken to the altar of the Spirits, which is located outside the village, and placed with its head towards the altar. Then prayers are said asking the Spirit to cure the sick person. When the ceremony is over the animal is taken back to the village, where it is cut into pieces and divided among all the inhabitants. The invalid rarely gets well.

"There are also sorcerers and witches among the Thais, who are consulted in circumstances of lesser importance.

[775] "The Thais believe in metempsychosis, although their ideas on the subject are not very clear" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

771 Religion of the Khas. Among the Khas, even those who practice
782 Buddhism, the only existing religion is a religion of "Phis" which is
776 similar to the Thai belief in "Spirits, Genii and Demons." The outer manifestations of this cult consist of offerings of rice, flowers and fruit, but never include sacrifices of animals. Small shelters which affect the form of an ordinary house are built at the entrance to villages to receive propitiatory offerings destined for the "Phi".

"symbol" and the last vestige of an ancient usage, for the rockets can only set a few handfuls of straw afire. The wives and children of the deceased, all in great mourning costume, that is to say entirely clothed in white cotton goods, came and prostrated themselves before the Governor of the province, presented him with a platter of flowers and wax candles and asked him whether the King, "the master of life," had given permission for the cremation to take place and whether, for this purpose, he had sent "fire" from Luang-Prabang.

The Governor gave the fire to the dead man's relatives and then, in giving permission to cremate, he delivered an address which may be translated as follows:

[212] "The Tiao-Muong of Pak-Lay has been a good and just man during his life. He has never committed perjury. We may hope, together with his numerous family, that his Phi (soul) will be taken by the Thévada (angels) to the Spaces and there be presented to the holy Buddhas, Phra-Pouthi-Tiao, Phra-Tama-Tiao and Phra-Sang-Kha-Tiao, who will take him with them to Paradise to stay for a while. Then, at the time of rebirth, his Phi will again be incarnated in the body of a just, good and happy man who will have all the goods which are to be desired and a numerous progeniture."
[Illustration here]

The songs and music stopped during this speech, but they began again with new zest when the Governor of the province approached the pyre and set fire to the four corners. He was immediately followed and imitated by the family, the bonzes, the officials and the spectators. All without exception insisted on contributing fire, either with wax candles, resinous torches, dry bamboo or firebrands, or else with whole boxes of matches [213] or even with mere handfuls of dry grass which they had uprooted.

A thick, suffocating black smoke reeking of kerosene and resin rose up and enveloped the catafalque, and then a few tongues of flame shot forth. The evening wind was beginning to be felt and cleared the smoke somewhat. The flames grew hotter and finally hid the catafalque. A backward rush began, for the heat was far too intense and forced the spectators to move away from the [Illustration here] pyre. Only a few men armed with green bamboo poles remained nearby, seared by the fire but attentive and anxious, for someone had to see whether the coffin would lean to the right side, that is to say in the direction of Luang-Prabang, the residence of the King from whence "the fire" came. With a sudden crackling

764 the fire collapsed. In a great shower of sparks, in the middle of a
787 long blue flame, the coffin tottered and fortunately leaned to the right side. The dead man's spirit was satisfied, and it was also an excellent omen for the prosperity of the Muong.

764 [214] Now the pyre, the catafalque, the coffin, the corpse and all were nothing more than an immense live fire, an incandescent mass which projected bizarre flashes on the motley crowd and gave to it, in the evening twilight beside the great river, a phantasmagorical air.

From time to time one of the posts of the canopy could be seen in the center of the fire, rising towards the sky like a gigantic torch. The coffin toppled, and for the space of a second the corpse seemed to appear grimacing and twisting in the middle of the flames, like a salamander.

The whole fire fell in, and the crackling noises lessened. Two or three tongues of flame shot out here and there, only to be extinguished immediately. The coals finished burning themselves out, and soon nothing was left of the pyre and of the whole edifice, so bizarrely decorated, but a pile of gray ashes in the middle of which a few whitish and incompletely burned bone fragments could still be seen. With night the last gleams of the pyre disappeared, the last coals went out and the only light remaining was that of the twinkling stars.

Early the next day the bonzes went to the spot where the pyre had stood. They collected the ashes which had been cooled by dew during the night and then, after throwing a few handfuls to the four winds, they used the rest to draw a crude human face on the ground. The few whitish bones which were still left and which crumbled at the touch were collected and placed in a jar of ordinary earth, which would be buried in the enclosure of a pagoda at the foot of a sacred "ficus."

[565] Later on, since the deceased had been well-to-do and his family was wealthy, the latter would be helped by the people of the province to build a brick pyramid called "That" inside the pagoda enclosure.

A few ashes in an urn and, in some, the memory of a great celebration and a few good meals...and that is all that remained of the man who had long been a great leader in his province.

533 Music. "Instrumental music holds a place of honor in Laos.
534 The instruments are few in number, and are of Malayan and Chinese origin.

tigers; 784

--to eat lying down, for fear of turning into a snake; a story told to encourage children to hold themselve well while eating;

--to eat the liver and the gizzard of the chicken, for fear of becoming mad: a story to make children leave, to the adults, all that is good on a dish;

--to open one's strong-box or one's small box for locking up money, jewels or other valuable objects, during the night; wealthy persons who did not observe this rule would soon become poor;

--and finally, to put an end to this long enumeration, there is the interdict to a married couple to sleep in the same bed on the birthday of one of the marriage partners.

I leave you the trouble, Ladies and Gentlemen, to think about these beliefs.

Among us a wedding present consisting of jewels or of silver 784
plate may be of an uneven number. But where bank notes or objects /801/
of lesser importance are concerned, the number must always be even.

Certain superstitions come close to French superstitions. For 787
instance: a buzzing in the ears signifies: "Somebody is saying something bad about me somewhere." In Laos if someone drops his bowl of rice while eating, this has the same significance. The buzzing in the ears means that the phi (demon) asks you for the way but that you do not deign to answer. That is why you get a hard box on the ear. Then you must answer him: "Thang louang nok ban!" (Follow the great road which passes in front of the house). An itch in the ears means that it is going to rain.

Another French superstition which has passed into a proverb 777
is: "Lucky at cards (play), unlucky in love." Laotians are more fortunate, for they do not have this belief. Among us one can be lucky at play and at the same time lucky in love.

Pierre NGINN

Director of Information Nationale
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include all the local genii one comes across in Indochina, either under the name of Neak Ta in Cambodia, or Phi in Laos, to mention only two countries. The cult of the Phi is still very much alive in Laos, although it has long been contested by the Buddhist clergy and forbidden by an edict of Phothisarath in 1527.

[30] But there are several classes of phi. First of all there are the universal phi, those are the ones which Buddhist tradition has attempted to assimilate for better or worse.

The book of Khun Bolom says precisely that the Phi Fa (Phi of heaven) and the Phi Then are in reality Indra, and the guardians of the four worlds. The Phi Sua Muon are Nang Tholani (Dharani, goddess of the earth) and Nang Mekhala (Manimekhala, deity of the sea). Finally there is the Phi Then Ten (Visvakarman, the builder).

The local protecting genii of the kingdom of Lan Xan are the fifteen Nagaraja (Praya Nak) who are the genii of water, living in the river rapids, at the confluence of rivers, on the rocks on the river banks or in caves. Their natural form is that of a serpent, but they can also take on human form.

Then follow the familiar genii, the wandering phi (Phi Pho), and the phi of dwellings (Phi Heuan). The Phi Heuan are honored at the time of marriage, and the Laotian code prescribes the indemnities which must be paid to please the Phi. There are also the phi of parents [or relatives--Translator] (Phi Me). These are often confused with the preceding ones. Their cult is celebrated either inside the house, or outside in a small shelter built for this purpose. This little structure is usually built leaning against a tree; sometimes it contains a small statuette or a stone, or even nothing. In that case one finds only a few grains of glutinous rice, and one or two small sticks of incense in a horn made of a banana leaf. This little house is the home of the Phi. He watches the living from the beyond and manifests himself every time a member of the family behaves badly. His intervention is most often known by a sudden and serious illness. One must then try to find out what has displeased the phi. For this one goes to the "sorcerer" and he will indicate [31] the sacrifice which must be made to the phi to appease his anger."

There exist also village phi to whom honor and offerings are due at the time of every ritual or local ceremony, particularly about the seventh month. Coinciding with a sort of pause in the ordinary activity of the Laotian, a pause which is regulated by a change in season, return of the rains and the rise of the Mekong waters, the feasts of the "months of the spirits" are centered around the evocation

776 of one or several spirits who are reincarnated in one possessed. This
796 person enables the villagers and those living in the same quarter to
•787 know the course of the new year and, if necessary, to improve it by means of gifts and prayers. During this time the village is forbidden to strangers (Lévy).

776 A series of particularly dangerous phi is also known; these are
725 the Phi Phetu (Sk: Preta), that is the wandering souls of people who have died in an abnormal way, by accident, suicide, childbirth for a woman, etc. These souls cannot be born again. They remain present in order to torment human beings. The Phi Houa Kout are
776 the headless phi, the Phi Khon Long are those who carry the coffins,
754 the Phi Pop have the power of entering into the body of a living human being. The unfortunate person then has the evil eye and is expelled from the village. In the region of Savannakhet, there is a village of victims of the Phi Pop which was created by a Protestant mission, in order to rescue these poor creatures who would otherwise die of hunger, for they are forbidden to enter any village.

The Phi Phong are the spirits of human beings who have studied the formulas to acquire magic powers but have not conformed strictly to certain rites prescribed by their studies. They are bloodthirsty and go out at night by the light of the fire [32] which issues from their nostrils along the banks of rivers and streams, and of ponds, to catch fish and toads. If one meets a Phi Phong, one must flee for he can spit in one's face, and then one may become a Phi Phong oneself.

776 The Phi Kong Koi lives in the mountains and has the shape of a monkey. During his existence on earth he was the servant of a Vietnamese. One day, having been too badly treated, he decided to escape. But in order not to be caught, he camouflaged his footprints by putting his heels in front and his toes behind. The Vietnamese, deceived by this trick, went off in the opposite direction and never found him. In our days when the Laotians want to chase away the Phi Kong Koi, the speak Vietnamese to each other. But if one is traveling in the mountains, one must refrain from lighting a fire or cooking any fish or meat or crabs, for the odor attracts the phi who wants to come and eat. His victim would have his intestines split open. The approach of the phi is always preceded by a violent storm and a torrential rain. There are said to be a great many Phi King Koi in the region of Samneua.

[198]

There is, however, another kind of Phi, This one seems to have a particular hatred for archaeologists. These are the phis who inhabit sculptures or the tumuli which are found in the bush [en brousse]. But that is another story...

[touques].

The experts throw themselves on the stone, turning it over to see if its underside has been wetted. According to the arrangement of the dry spots, [41] deductions are drawn on the topography of the rice fields which will be flooded, or remain dry, and on the advantage of making rice fields either "high or low."

This sacrifice of the buffalo is found in the myth of Gavampati the strange monk held aloof by the Buddhist community because he took the attitude of being an enemy of the waters. His death allowed the arrival of the rains.

Khao Vassa (Feast of the Eighth Month).

This is the date of the beginning of the Buddhist Lent. During the three months of rains, not being able to go from one place to another preaching, the Buddha and his community retired into the park of the Jetavana. Besides the season of rains, as it awakens life everywhere, causes animals to swarm in great numbers. It is therefore impossible at this time of year to travel without violating, at each step, the precept which forbids the destruction of all existence, however infinitely small it may be. Thus, during this period, the bonzes may not leave the pagoda and are obliged to be present at the general confession.

Oldenberg describes this confession according to the Pali texts as follows:

"No monk may miss it. Only he who is stricken with mental alienation may be dispensed....By the light of a torch, the monks take their places at the place of assembly on low stools which have been prepared for them. Neither laymen nor student bonzes [bonzillons] nor nuns may be present, for the rule of the Order, to be recited in the form of a formula of confession, is considered in principle as a secret appurtenance of the monks only. This formula of confession, the Patimokkgam, is recited aloud by the oldest member [doyen].

"Oh Reverend one, whoever has committed a sin, may he confess it.... After the third time that the question has been repeated, if a monk does not confess a sin which [42] he has committed and which he remembers, he is guilty of an intentional lie. Now an intentional lie, oh reverend one, is an obstacle to religious life. Such are the words of the Blessed One."

Then there follows a list of the sins which must be confessed. At the head of the list are the most serious ones:

173: Deydier--36 H, E-3 (no date) 1952 AM1 Indochina
(ca. 1940) Laotians AM8

Marriage

In Laos one gets married in the even months. The favorite month 585
is the sixth, that of the feast of rockets, and the last one possible, 805
because in the eighth month the sons-in-law do not dare to interrupt the work in the fields and after that until the twelfth month the Buddhist Lent must be observed.

[56] **The Marriage Proposal.** Laotian tradition requires [782]
a previous request, and the obligatory giving of the Kha Khun Phi, 584
tribute paid to the guardian genii, also the optional gift of the Kha Dong, the dowery which is given by the husband to the bride or to her parents.

The boy's mother, accompanied by one or two aged female relatives, goes to the home of the young girl, and in the course of conversing asks if the girl is of age to be married. The mother is free to answer that her daughter is too young or that no young man loves her, and that she runs the risk of remaining an old maid. In this last event the answer is an acceptance. Then during further visits material questions are settled. Up until the day of marriage the two affianced ones do not exchange a single word, and besides it is not necessary for them to know each other. However, as the Laotian villages are not very big, it is probable that the young people have had the opportunity to meet several times at the boun.

The official request takes place the day before the wedding and 788
on the evening of this day; after dinner, the young man goes to 584
the home of his future bride and with her attends the prayer of the bonzes who bless the water contained in begging bowls. A white cotton cord links together the bonzes, the begging bowls and the two betrothed. The blessed water is kept throughout the night. The next day at the earliest hour the same bonzes, the relatives and friends come and sprinkle the two young people generously with this water. When they have dried themselves and changed their clothes, they make their morning offering to the bonzes who bless them once more.

The Sou Khouan. This is properly called the marriage 585
ceremony. The days and hours for the ceremony are determined by [787]
the aged hora (astrologists or soothsayers) after a minute study of the horoscopes of each one. This ceremony takes place in the home of the young girl. After a [57] family Sou Khouan celebrated at his home, the husband returns to his betrothed accompanied by two comrades who protect him with two parasols and followed by a procession of bearers.

764 coffin is placed on a truck. The bonzes are at the head of the procession, then the widow and the children dressed in white as a sign of mourning.

[60] The coffin is placed on the pyre. All those attending, holding a lighted candle or resinous torch, go to the pyre in single file, and throw the brands into the fire. It is forbidden to light a torch by lending one's light or by borrowing that of a neighbor. During this time the family must throw offerings to the crowd: pieces of banana branches, lemons, etc., into which have been introduced coins mixed with grilled rice. The cotton thread, called fay mongkhou, which [751] had surrounded the house in order to chase away sorrow, illness, the phi, etc., is removed at the end of the ceremony.

On the third day the bones are fetched away. The bonzes are [187] invited, but before touching the ashes, they must be examined to see [775] if they have left any imprints either animal or human, in order to know in what form the dead man will be reborn. The bones are gathered with wooden pincers and then placed in an urn. A statue in a vaguely human form is erected of wet cinders. The urn and the offerings are surrounded by a cotton thread, then the bonzes recite a prayer and this closes the ceremony. The urn will be placed in a pagoda or buried by the family who will erect a that. A little later, to commemorate the death of the departed, the family will dig a hole in the pagoda or near the that, and in it plant a long bamboo at the end of which is fastened a cotton banner laminated with small bamboo sticks. A tray of offerings is brought, which had been placed at the foot of the bamboo pole while it was being set up, and which is held by the relatives and friends of the dead man. Before this, offerings of food had been wrapped in a banana leaf. Once the bamboo is set up, water is poured all around on the earth which is holding it up, in the hope that the merits of this action will reach the other world. Then the whole family [61] squats down around the pole and with joined hands recites prayers.

The Laotian House.

342 It is built on piles and has a veranda. The roof is curved slightly inwards. A long stake holding the water jar is sunk in the ground near the veranda outside the house. The floor is of bamboo or of thin wide boards. The wall and ceiling are of bamboo panels, or of boards, or of mud. There are two principal doors and few windows. A partition going from the inner beam of the front gable separates the house lengthwise in two parts, most often of equal size. One is divided into

301 The use of these magic shirts is also known in Cambodia. The designs
262 usually consist of flowers, geometric figures, tools, flowers, vegetable
751 branches, and of animals. Sometimes pictures drawn from Buddhist iconography can be recognized.

[174] Apparently the origin of tattooing is to be found in totemism. By
301 analyzing the Laotian tattooing designs, [63] it has been possible to recognize traces of sun worship, as well as the mythological role of the dog. But at the present time Laotians seem only to value tattooing as an artistic ornament.

The Divining Rod.

•787 Among the curios which the tourist looks for in Laos, the most
823 easily found is a carved bamboo cane. Immediately below the head,
825 which is often of chased silver, there is a sort of checkered diagram made up of twenty-five little squares. Below this divining diagram are found, in succession from top to bottom, a zebu, a horse, a rakshasha or ogre, a tiger, a buffalo, a deer, an elephant. These animals correspond respectively to the days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

It should be noted that, except for the buffalo and the deer, the others are the symbolical animals of the zodiac and correspond to the different cardinal points.

The Laotians consult these figures at different actions of their lives: choice of a wedding day, the hour for burial, etc. The diagram is used to calculate the hour, and the animals indicate the cardinal point which should be followed.

This cane is also found among the Man.

[64] THE NEW YEAR AND THE FEASTS OF THE FIFTH MONTH

527 The Laotian New Year always takes place between the 6th day
805 of the crescent moon of the 5th month and the 5th day of the crescent moon of the 6th month. The very core of the feast includes three days: the last day of the past year, the intermediate day and the New Year's day, properly so-called. The most picturesque ceremonies are those of Luang Prabang, for there tradition has been best preserved.

527 The programme of the feasts begins with a procession of royal elephants. Their heads ornamented with red and black painted designs, their drivers dressed in red tunics with yellow lapels, on their backs, the fifteen elephants go to the pagodas of Xieng Tong, Vat

226 village. At the foot of the tree which is supposed to contain the
[182] dwelling of the genie, there is an altar about two meters high. Here,
the Chao Muong, surrounded by all the fishermen, places five roasted
527 chickens, two bottles of [13] rice alcohol, six coconuts, some betel
leaves, some areca nuts, some cakes, some small sticks of incense,
some beeswax candles. These he offers to the genie, asking him to
intervene in his favor so that the fishing this year be fruitful.

•787 The genie is addressed by the intermediary of one of the village
527 sorceresses. As soon as she is "possessed" by the genie, she goes into
226 a trance. She is then unconscious of what is happening around her
and the genie answers through her mouth to the questions asked of her
by the fishermen. Invariably the genie's answer is the same: the
catch will be fruitful if traditions peculiar to the fishing of the pa beuk
are followed. The possessed woman, surrounded by a circle of fisher-
men, is at first standing up and is holding a cup in which are flowers,
[592] small sticks of incense, and ten beeswax candles. Her hands begin to
tremble when the genie enters into her; she then sets the cup down at
her feet, and, on top of her own clothes, puts on those of the fishermen
who present her with them on a tray for the sacrifice: an ordinary
sin, a cotton shirt dyed red, a belt and a turban also of cotton dyed
red to which are added a metallic plaster, and two yards [brasse]
of white cotton cloth for her personal use. After turning all around,
she squats down, her bust moving in a gyrating motion, and from
this moment she speaks in the name of the genie.

On the 10th day of the crescent moon the Chao Muong and the
preachers arrive at Kao Lieu, "the nine windings" of the Mekong,
where there is a very famous genie who is much more powerful than
that of Ban Si Khay. Forming a large procession, they fetch the
village sorceress with parasols, lances, swords and gongs. Piled high
on an offering tray are nine bars of silver, two kilograms of beeswax,
ten candles, four coconuts, some betel leaves, some areca nuts,
[14] a metal plaster, two yards [brasse] of white cloth, a raw hen's
egg, a bottle of rice alcohol. The procession returns with the sorcer-
ess to the front of the altars which are regular houses, and everyone
settles down in them. The entrance is to the west, that is, opposite
[78] the town. The offerings for the genie are four times greater than at
Ban Si Khay as each altar receives nine roast chickens, nine bars of
silver, four coconuts, some areca, some betel, candles, small
sticks of incense. In addition, every three years, a buffalo is sacri-
ficed, and in the years between, a pig. There are the same questions
and the same answers as at Ban Si Khay.